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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on under-identification of minority children, especially Hispanic children, for education as gifted and talented students. It begins with definitions of terms such as "gifted and talented" and also such terms as "bias" and "culturally diverse." Some characteristics of gifted Hispanic children are then listed as well as some culturally supported attitudes and abilities that limit learning. Recommendations of various authors on appropriate tools for identification of gifted Hispanic children stress use of multiple measures, of informal and formal data, renorming for subpopulations, and use of teacher and peer recommendations. Data on the degree of under-representation of minority groups in gifted programs are then provided and problems in identification cited, especially the use of I.Q. alone to identify giftedness. Obstacles to identification of gifted minority children are also identified, including parents who cannot speak English, traditions of the minority group, and prejudices. Next, common social-emotional problems of the bilingual student are noted. Finally, suggested educational adaptations for the gifted Hispanic student include using mentors as tutors, encouraging a questioning attitude, and helping to deal with peer pressures not to succeed. (Contains 21 references.) (DB)

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HISPANIC CHILDREN & GIFTEDNESS: WHY THE DIFFICULTY IN IDENTIFICATION?

By
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ED 445 436

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1

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Hispanic Children and Giftedness: Why the Difficulty in Identification?

Juan is a bright nine-year-old Hispanic student. He was retained in second grade and referred for special education services. His lack of proficiency in English has interfered with his learning to read. Juan is a very creative thinker, always offering unique and divergent solutions to problems. He was not identified for his school's gifted program because his scores on I.Q. and achievement tests were low.

This story is not unusual for students from culturally diverse, low-income backgrounds. Data from several research studies show that disadvantaged minority children are frequently underserved by gifted and talented programs. Our educational system often penalizes children who are raised with significantly different values and attitudes from those found in the dominant culture (Clark, 1988). This paper will focus on the Hispanic population since, as Chamber, Barron, and Sprecher (1980) pointed out, such students appear to be receiving the least support from the present assessment procedures. Problems will be explored relating to characteristics of gifted children, appropriate tools for identification, and social-emotional problems of this special population.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Masten (1985) says that an understanding of giftedness and bias are necessary in a discussion of assessment of gifted minority students. The United States Office of Education legislated the following definition of giftedness:

Gifted and talented are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require

EC 308040

differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by "regular school programs" in order to realize their contributions to self and society. These are children with "demonstrated" and/or "potential" high performance in the following areas: (a) general intellectual ability; (b) specific academic aptitude; (c) creative or productive thinking; (d) leadership ability; and (e) psychomotor ability.

This definition is widely used. As Richert (1985) says, there are several advantages to using the federal definition. It does not have the legitimacy of national law behind it. It is also comprehensive in order to be applicable in many settings.

In the literature on the assessment of gifted minorities, the term "bias" is frequently used, but rarely defined. Masten (1985) identifies these two accepted definitions of bias:

(1) Constant or systematic error as opposed to chance error.

(2) In mathematical statistics, bias refers to a systematic under- or over-estimation of a population parameter by a statistic based upon samples drawn from the population.

Areas of potential bias as summarized by Reynolds (1982) include inappropriate test content, inappropriate standardization samples, examiner and language bias, inequitable social consequences, measurement of different constructs, and differential predictive validity. Attempts to deal with perceived test bias produce supposedly "culture-fair" and "culture free" tests. Culture fair tests do not exist because culture

influences all environmental contacts and therefore test performance. Because tests favor individuals from the same culture in which they were developed, there are no culture-free tests either (Anastasi, 1982).

Sisk (1987) clarifies other important terms mentioned in this paper. "Culturally diverse" means that students are members of a culture significantly different in values, attitudes, and practices from the majority culture. Sometimes these children are also disadvantaged, which means being poor or being a member of the lower socioeconomic classes.

The definition of these terms should help the reader gain a greater understanding of the problems being focused on within this paper.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED HISPANIC CHILDREN

Culturally diverse gifted children differ in many respects, but they do hold certain mental traits in common (Clark, 1988, p. 489):

(1) The ability to manipulate some symbol systems held valuable in the subculture

(2) The ability to think logically, given appropriate data

(3) The ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems

(4) The ability to reason by analogy

(5) The ability to extend or extrapolate knowledge to new situations or unique applications.

Clark (1988) also lists some culturally supported attitudes and abilities that limit learning:

(1) Attitudes depreciating education for family after high school; higher education seen as unrealistic, especially for women

(2) Sex role stereotyping--each is expected to adhere to a defined role

(3) Lack of experience with values of other cultures

(4) Emphasis on family over achievement and life goals of children.

APPROPRIATE TOOLS FOR IDENTIFICATION

Richert (1987) suggests a variety of practices for ensuring that the disadvantaged culturally gifted have increased access to the services they need. Several practices are useful at more than one stage of identification: nomination into a pool, assessment for placement in a specific program option, evaluation of identification once students are placed in a program option. Richert (1985) believes that identification procedures must reflect current research and eliminate inequity by using a variety of methods of identification. Giftedness has many dimensions: abilities, personality factors, and environment. In assessing abilities, it is essential to understand that each instrument or procedure measures only one of many facets. Measures that go beyond academic achievement must be used to find students whose abilities are not indicated by tests and school performance. Informal and formal data must be used. Richert (1985) says both formal and informal procedures are necessary to avoid test bias and to include all gifted students in need of special programming.

Masten (1985) believes that gifted assessment needs to be a continuous process and not limited to a single test administration. He identifies some research based approaches to identify gifted minority students. For Hispanic children, he advises using

the WISC, Cartoon Conservation Scale, Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, and the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment.

School districts have an option when using a test that has cultural bias. They can norm for each subpopulation. The procedure is to take the same percent top scoring students from each subpopulation as from among advantaged students so that representative numbers of disadvantaged and advantaged students are identified (Richert, 1985).

Baldwin (1985) suggests that recommendations of teachers and peers would be a good instrument with which to identify gifted minority students. Interviews would also be helpful. A product portfolio would be another informal kind of tool to use for identification. This would include the child's special projects which could be rated on a creativity scale.

PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

The United States takes pride in having a great variety of nationalities, ethnic, and racial groups. Our laws ensure the equality of these groups. However, many of these people are thought of as inferior, when actually they are only different. We have a long way to go in meeting the needs of these groups.

Giftedness at the highest level can be found in every racial and ethnic group. However, it does differ from group to group. This difference results from differing values, attitudes, and opportunities. What is valued in the culture is produced by the culture. In some instances, poverty compounds the already evident problem.

Richert (1985) says that while most states formally subscribe to the comprehensive federal definition of giftedness, in practice local districts tend to seek and

find white, middle-class academic achievers. Figures published by the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights in 1972 revealed that minority groups are under-represented by 30-70% in gifted programs throughout the nation (and over-represented by 40-50% in special education programs). Underachieving, poor and minority gifted children who most need programs to develop their potential are consistently under-represented. Exum and Colangelo (1986) explain that gifted students of culturally diverse backgrounds do have meaningfully different needs from other gifted youngsters. If these needs are not recognized, then appropriate educational programming is seriously hampered. Van Tassell-Baska and Willis (1987) state that needs of minority and economically deprived students have been sorely neglected in American schools. Bruch (1978) analyzed the literature on special programs for minority gifted populations by ethnic group and found only eighteen programs in the United States operative prior to high school.

IDENTIFICATION

Baldwin (1985) believes that one perspective on the problems associated with identifying and nurturing minority gifted children is that the research and literature on minorities has been focused more on deficits than on strengths. He also admits that identifying gifted children from minority groups has posed one of the most challenging problems in the education of the gifted.

In 1982, the National Report on Identification (Richert, Alvino, & McDonnel) revealed a great deal of confusion about defining, identifying, and determining which populations should be served in gifted programs. Some of the problems cited in the report follow:

1. There is confusion about the definition of giftedness because of its vagueness.

2. Educational equity is being violated in the identification of significant subpopulations. Tests are used for populations for which they have not been normed. Various minority groups are excluded systematically from gifted programs as a result of biased procedures.

3. Identification instruments are being misused. Tests are being used to measure abilities which they are not designed to determine. For example, achievement, aptitude, and I.Q. tests are used almost interchangeably, thereby confusing specific aptitudes and general intellectual ability. Achievement measures and I.Q. tests are also being used inappropriately to identify creativity and leadership.

4. Instruments and procedures are being used at inappropriate stages of the identification process. Diagnosis is not the purpose of initial screening procedures; however, use of these tests for screening is common. Such tests are useful only for considering placement in a particular course or measuring progress.

The controversy centers around whether I.Q. by itself can designate or identify giftedness, whether broader or diverse definitions of discrete abilities are more appropriate, or if characteristics beyond the cognitive are necessary or more relevant. She also points out that most writers in the field of cognitive science as well as in the education of the gifted have been working to expand concepts of giftedness beyond I.Q. (Richert, 1987).

OBSTACLES TO IDENTIFICATION

de Bernard (1985) points out that historically, Hispanic bilingual children in the United States have demonstrated a lower rate of achievement than their Anglo-American counterparts on English standardized reading tests. In many areas, these scores are used as a major criterion for placement in gifted programs. Children who speak little or no English, naturally, cannot do well on these tests; however, the most intriguing problem concerns the reading achievement of those Hispanic children who demonstrate well-developed English vocabularies and often impress teachers with their ability to translate instructions to new arrivals. Mace-Matluck and Dominguez (1981) found that these same children who are apparently proficient in English and often far above average in classroom performance, score lower than expected on reading tests.

Bernal (1981) also sees that bilingual students have to work harder and perform better than their majority peers in order to reach approximate performance levels. Gallagher (1985) says that performance on an I.Q. test is determined, to some extent, by past opportunity and experience. This is what makes it difficult to use I.Q. information in evaluating the intellectual capabilities of the youngsters who come from different home and cultural backgrounds. Baldwin (1985) lists the main factors affecting our success in identifying gifted minority children.

1. Parents who cannot speak English and thus cannot converse with their children may be unable to foster English language skills.

2. A lack of conversation in the home may deny children the opportunity to learn the art of dialogue.

3. Cultural attitudes that emphasize having respect for elders may make minority children appear to be cowardly and backward.

4. The traditions of the minority group may supersede the commonly accepted practices of the majority, leading to misconceptions about the abilities of children.

5. An environment that is focused on survival may force children to accept mature responsibilities in order to satisfy immediate needs rather than to pursue education.

6. Standard, out of school experiences such as visiting museums, libraries, and zoos may be limited for minorities.

7. Prejudices against minorities that may exist in the community may have a negative effect upon minority members' self-concepts.

8. Minority children's use of their native language, which may be rich in imagery, may interfere with their learning the precise vocabulary of standard school language.

Bernal (1981) states that even when home and school share the same values, gifted and talented bilingual students may not readily gain recognition, leading to identification and nurturance by the public schools, for they must overcome language as well as cultural barriers before they may demonstrate high intellectual potentials and specific academic aptitudes.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF THE BILINGUAL STUDENT

The gifted and talented usually do not experience the same type of discrimination and social rejection as do many of the handicapped. Yet like the handicapped they may suffer isolation from mainstream society and seek others with equal abilities who may

provide a feeling of acceptance as well as intellectual or emotional stimulation. Rejection of the gifted and talented may differ from that of the handicapped, because the roots may stem from a lack of understanding or jealousy rather than from the stigma that may relate to certain handicapping conditions (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986).

Bernal (1981) says the linguistically and culturally different, yet gifted and talented children, are the minority of the majority. All the social pressures and psychological burdens felt by the regular gifted chidden fall on them, too, and many times heavier. Being gifted, they may be especially perceptive of prejudice, rejection, and hostility; and they may feel hurt more than ordinary people would feel. These prolonged hurt feelings and constant struggles with rejection, loneliness and stress affect their personalities and emotions.

Bernal (1981) also observed that these children were generally healthy and happy before they began school. Negative social-emotional changes occurred, sometimes dramatically, sometimes gradually, once they entered public schools. As soon as these children began school, social and/or emotional problems developed. Later on they were identified or confirmed by schools as gifted and/or talented. Through personal observation and conversation with the children, their parents and teachers revealed that these students often experienced intolerance, social rejection, verbal and even physical abuses in school. Because of this, most of them tried to decrease their highly visible minority characteristics and behaviors.

Leung (1981) says that gifted minority students become the "best of the worse," and are considered "second-order gifted," like second-class citizens.

EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATIONS FOR THE GIFTED HISPANIC STUDENT

Gallagher (1985) says the important issue for educators is how to make meaningful adaptations for culturally diverse gifted students. Three major types of adaptations have been suggested: counseling, the building of self-knowledge, and the development of some meaningful curriculum adaptations.

Students caught between competing cultures need special attention. Culturally diverse students are caught between the need to express their talents and the need to adhere to family patterns and values. It is strongly suggested that counselors become immersed in and familiar with the cultural background and values of minority groups to help them deal with this problem.

One of the dimensions that gifted children from culturally diverse backgrounds share with one another is a degree of discomfort with the use of verbal symbols. Therefore, specialized programmatic efforts need to be designed with that understanding in mind. Expression of feelings through theater and related arts works well.

There are a number of opportunities for some minor changes in existing curricula which could make the material more relevant and interesting to the culturally diverse student. Development of curricula and teaching strategies that facilitate the sharing of cultural or racial experiences with children from other backgrounds could emphasize the importance of each group.

Colangelo (1985) has made these suggestions for parents, counselors, and teachers who wish to work successfully with culturally diverse gifted learners:

1. Use mentors to tutor culturally diverse students.
2. Help them to develop questioning attitudes.

3. Help them understand and explore the problems they may face as they try to align their cultural values with those of the dominant culture and as they try to develop their own individuality.

4. Help them cope with peer pressures not to succeed, when they exist.

5. Help them to remediate any areas of skill that are lacking.

6. Give them opportunities to explore a variety of career options.

CONCLUSIONS

Many culturally disadvantaged Hispanic students can be or are gifted. If we will give them a chance to achieve and believe in themselves, they may someday make great contributions to our society. They can only do this if we adequately identify and service their areas of giftedness. Data indicates that not enough Hispanic children are being identified for gifted programs. This should raise questions in our minds as to the accuracy of the tests we are using for placing children in these programs. We must be concerned that educational opportunities are provided to all students. After all, the United States boasts that we are a "melting pot." The question this paper proposes with regard to that statement is, "Are we trying to actually melt children so only the elite fit into our nice neat 'pot'?"

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